



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Choosing to be Free - The Second Sunday of Lent- 3_13_2022

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to it! How often have I desired to gather you together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing."

That is the lament that Jesus has for God's children who over and over refuse to see one another as God does: as one human family, brothers and sisters of a common kinship, as God's beloved children. That is the lament for people who reject God's messengers, who have called us over and over to turn away from our divisions and our rivalries and our competition and our jealousy and our pride and our hubris and the violence and the killing that inevitably follows. If only you could see one another as I do. If only you knew how much I want to gather you all up and hold you all in my arms so that you might see one another as a mother does, through a mother's eyes, through my eyes.

That is Jesus's lament for Jerusalem. And I dare say it is His lament for our world today, a world divided and at war, a world enslaved to fear. Last week, Father Bill invited us to consider a simple yet profound question. Are we free, or are we unfree? When life confronts us with challenges that seem overwhelming, suffering, tragedy, loss, sickness and outright evil, does it hold this captive? Do we allow it to consume us? Do we fall into despair at the brokenness of this world? Or do we choose to be free and to hold fast to our identity as one of God's own? And keep our trust in God and place all of it in His hands, and remind ourselves that in the end, in the fullness of time, the brokenness of this world will be mended. The suffering will be healed. The violence will end and the evil of this world will not win.

So while I believe that with all my heart, I want to wrestle a bit more with that question of just how, how do we go about choosing to be free? Because our gospel today offers some important insights, I think. But also because I will be the first to admit to being more than a bit captive to my fear and despair of late as with many of you, I have felt held hostage to the anguish of the slow annihilation of a people unfolding before our eyes. And to the agonizing frustration that while we have the power to put an end to it, we are instead held captive to a very real fear of escalation into the unthinkable.

And I've been beset as well with a certain amount of shame that the ongoing wars and genocides in other parts of the world, often the third world, have never captured my attention in the same way. And I have struggled with guilt that

somehow I'm not doing enough to help any of it. I've noticed myself getting short of breath while watching the news. I had a nightmare about a bomb shelter, the likes of which I hadn't had since the eighties. I haven't been exercising as I should. I haven't been present to my friends and family as I need to be. I haven't been eating well, choosing instead a persistent diet of anxiety and bad news.

And so while I believe with all my heart, the words of our psalmist today, "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom then shall I fear? The Lord is my strength and my life. Whom then shall I be afraid?" I know this to be true. I also know as the psalmist does that God is not our waiter. He's not our butler to do our bidding. I know as the psalmist does that, despite his pleas for God to come to his defense once more, it will happen in God's time, not ours. And so in the meantime, we must tarry and we must wait patiently for the Lord. I suspect it is in this waiting that we become most susceptible to doubt and despair. I wonder, therefore, how might we instead consecrate this time of waiting? How might we make it holy and dedicated to God so that we might not only endure it but be transformed by it and become ourselves the very ones we are waiting for?

In our gospel today. Jesus, I think gives us two hints as to where we might start. Warned of a brutal dictator coming for Him, faced with impending doom and overwhelming military might, what does Jesus do? Does He flee, does He hide? Does He become preoccupied with it all, endlessly doom scrolling on the internet? Does He tell his followers to take up arms and prepare to go down fighting? Does He lash out? Does He call for someone to take Herod out? No, Jesus remains free. Confronted with the prospect of execution, He chooses to hold fast to who He is and the mission that God has called Him to.

And while we might be inclined to think, well, sure, that's easy for Him. He's the Son of God. But He's also fully human. Jesus is not a Demigod immune to the human needs and human emotions and human anxieties, like the temptations faced in the desert, hunger, power, security, safety. Each of them spoke to Jesus on a very real and very human level about His very real and very human needs. And He actually had to resist them and He actually had to refuse them just like we do.

What He's showing us is not how the Son of God can somehow just float above it all. No, He is showing us how we too can live with our fears, can feel our fears without losing ourselves in them. He was reminding us of the power of our God-given minds to be mindful, to be intentional with our thoughts and to use them to distinguish between our very real fears and the person God made us to be.

And if that is not already a spiritual practice for you. I invite you to try it in these remaining days of Lent. The next time you are experiencing strong negative emotions or the next time your worries and anxieties are getting the best of you,

or the next time you find yourself spiraling and becoming captive to your fears, in other words, maybe on your drive home today, step back and notice what you're feeling. Notice what you're thinking. Name it. Say it out loud. Share it with a friend. Write it down in a journal. Confess it to a priest. Post it on Facebook. However you do it, get it out – out of your head and off your heart and shine some light on it.

And then secondly become the observer of those thoughts and those negative feelings and those emotions and those anxieties, see the distance you've now created from them and see how you, the observer, exist apart from them. They are not you. And yes, it's an incredibly subtle shift, but it can be incredibly liberating. When they hit me, I sometimes imagine putting my fears and doubts in a kind of display case as if I were strolling through a museum of my anxieties. And as I walk by, I imagine the plaques, reading their descriptions, "See, I told you they don't really like you," which is right next door to "I told you you're not good enough." And of course the latest exhibit, "The world is coming to an end."

Whatever they are, whatever they are for you, see them apart from you, stroll by them, wave at them, wonder what's driving them, if you like, challenge their validity, perhaps. Befriend them, as Father Bill suggested last week. But whatever you do, take in that moment of separation between your fears and your doubts and who you are. Feel the peace, that that moment, that simple little move can give you and then use it to remind yourself who the observer is, who you have always been. God's beloved, perfectly formed, perfectly loved. Eternally the apple of God's eye, always forgiven and never left alone to face your fear. And then see if you can emerge from that moment more free, free to be the force of love and compassion and mercy and healing and courage that God wants us to be and that the world needs us to be.

Our gospel offers another lesson, I think, about being free. And that is to not let the seemingly insurmountable brokenness of the world overwhelm us. Freed from our fears, we must also resist the urge to throw up our hands and wonder what good could I possibly do against all of that. Facing a world of 2000 years ago, that was just as broken as ours today. With wars and rumors of wars, ethnic cleansings and injustice, slavery, and suffering around every corner, Jesus never worries that He's not doing enough. He's not concerned about how many people He's reached or how many people He hasn't yet reached. He is just focused on loving and serving whomever God puts in front of Him and showing us how to do so as well.

You don't have to do some big heroic thing. We don't have to be grandiose. We don't have to be wealthy or well connected to make a difference. We just need to show up with an open heart and with the gifts that God has already given us to do our part to love and serve the suffering before us, working our own

miracles along the way. Wait, miracles, did you say? Me? Each month, there's an opportunity to serve at the soup kitchen, the Crossroads. Isn't that a way to cast out the demons of hunger and hopelessness? When we make ourselves available to sit and just be totally present and listen to somebody who is alone, does that not help cure the epidemic of loneliness and feeling forgotten? When we take communion or read Psalms to somebody who is sick, does that not help heal their wary soul? When we forgive others and show mercy, are we not driving out the demons of resentment and anger?

And do you not know that when we pray, you are adding your voice to the chorus of salvation history, helping to ensure that the Herods of this world will never have the last word. Jesus gave His life to show us the way to be free. And the Holy Spirit has given us all we need to be her agents of mercy and compassion, so that we might hasten the day when we are all gathered together once more, one brood under God's wing.

Amen.